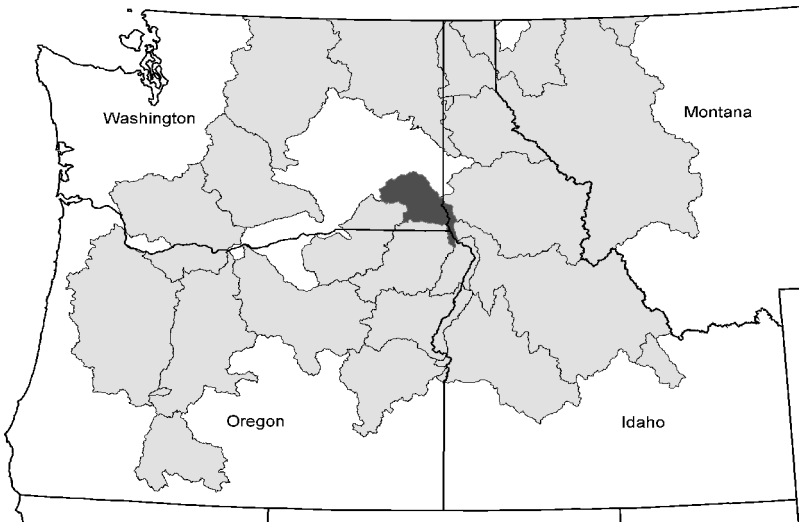
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Bull Trout Draft Recovery Plan

and proposed Critical Habitat

Snake River Basin Recovery Unit

(CHAPTER 24)



What areas are included in the Snake River Washington Recovery Unit?

This recovery unit encompasses selected tributaries of the Snake River from Lower Monumental Dam (river mile 42) upstream to the mouth of the Grande Ronde River (river mile 169). There are two core areas in this recovery unit: the Tucannon River, which contains eight local populations; and Asotin Creek, which contains two local populations.

How much of the area is proposed as critical habitat?

Two critical habitat subunits (CHSU) are located in southeast Washington: (1) the Tucannon River CHSU located in Columbia and Garfield counties, and (2) the Asotin Creek CHSU within Garfield and Asotin counties. A total of 203 miles of stream are proposed for critical habitat within this unit, which is approximately 7 percent of the waterways in the Snake River Washington Recovery Unit (see maps).

The Tucannon River CHSU encompasses the Tucannon River, Little Tucannon River, and Pataha Creek watersheds and their tributaries. Land-ownership in the Tucannon River CHSU is comprised of 71 percent Federal lands; 23 percent State or local government lands, and 6 percent privately owned lands. Proposed critical habitat in the Tucannon River CHSU includes a total of 104.1 miles in 12 streams within the subunit.

Asotin Creek CHSU is a tributary to the Snake River located in Asotin and Garfield counties, Washington. The Asotin Creek watershed landownership is approximately 31 percent Federally owned land, 8 percent State and local government owned land, and 61 percent privately owned land. Proposed critical habitat in the Asotin Creek CHSU includes a total of 98.9 miles in Asotin Creek and its tributaries within the subunit.

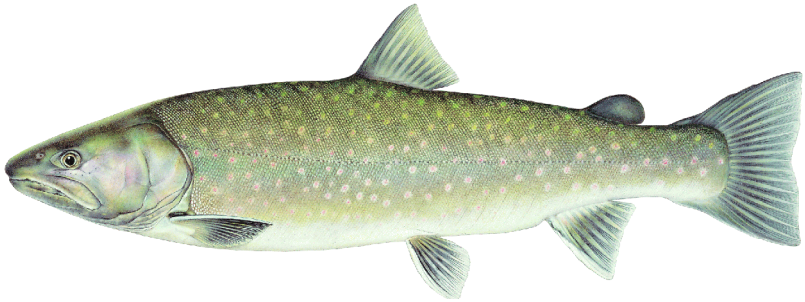
Who developed the draft Bull Trout Recovery Plan and critical habitat proposal?

The draft recovery plan for bull trout was developed through the collaboration of Federal, State, Tribal and private biologists working with representatives of local watersheds, private landowners and industry and conservation organizations. A total of 24 local recovery unit teams contributed to the development of the draft recovery plans for each of the recovery units. These recovery unit teams included experts in biology, hydrology and forestry, as well

as natural resource users and stakeholders with interest and knowledge of bull trout and the habitats they depend on for survival. The critical habitat proposal was based in large part on information developed by the recovery unit teams and supplemented with even more recent information on the current distribution and habitat characteristics of the species.

What is the relationship between the draft Bull Trout Recovery Plan and the critical habitat proposal?
The draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal are closely linked. The information developed by the recovery unit teams, and the science underlying that information, are the basis for the critical habitat proposals. However, critical habitat is designed to provide for the conservation of a species by identifying those areas essential for conservation and requiring special management, whereas a recovery plan is a much larger blueprint providing guidance for the eventual recovery and de-listing of a species.

Who would be affected by recovery efforts and a critical habitat designation?
A recovery plan is advisory only and carries no regulatory auth-ority. It is the Fish and Wildlife Service's estimation of the actions necessary for the recove-ry of the species. Agencies, communities or individuals are encouraged to take voluntary actions described in the recovery plan to benefit bull trout.



The primary effect of a critical habitat designation is that Federal agencies are required to consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service on actions they carry out, fund, or authorize that might affect critical habitat.

It is important to note that in most cases, this is already occurring under the section 7 interagency consultation requirements of the Endangered Species Act. Non-Federal entities, including private landowners, that may also be affected could include, for example, those seeking a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 404 permit under the Clean Water Act to build an in-water structure, those seeking Federal approval to discharge effluent into the aquatic environment, or those seeking Federal funding to implement private property improvements, where such actions affect the aquatic environment that has been designated as critical habitat. But again, in most cases where this link between activities on private lands and Federal funding, permitting, or author-ization exists, consultation under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act is already occurring.

A critical habitat designation does not have any effect on non-Federal entities when there is not a Federal nexus. For example, swimming, boating, fishing, farming, ranching, or any of a range of activities normally conducted by a landowner or operator of a business not involving Federal funding, permitting, or authorization in order to occur would not be affected.

How was the draft recovery plan for each unit developed?
Recovery units were delineated based on the biology of the species and considerations for paralleling existing State conservation and fisheries management frameworks wherever possible. Recovery teams incorporated existing State conservation processes to the degree possible, depending on the degree to which they had been developed (for example, the Montana Bull Trout Restoration Plan, the State of Idaho's Bull Trout Conservation Plan, the State of Washington's Statewide Strategy to Recover Salmon and the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds).

What is the status of bull trout in the Snake River Washington Recovery Unit?

Bull trout in this recovery area were listed in 1998 as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. There is not enough current survey data to make a reliable population estimate. Both resident and migratory forms of bull trout occur in the two core areas and some may use the Snake River main stem on a seasonal basis. Genetics studies need to be completed to determine the genetic characteristics and population structure of bull trout in the Tucannon River watershed. Numbers of bull trout in Asotin Creek have been difficult to estimate because so few have been counted during surveys. Biologists cannot determine whether bull trout are present in smaller tributaries within the recovery unit until more detailed surveys have been conducted. In recent years, bull trout have disappeared from some of the core area tributaries where they were previously documented.

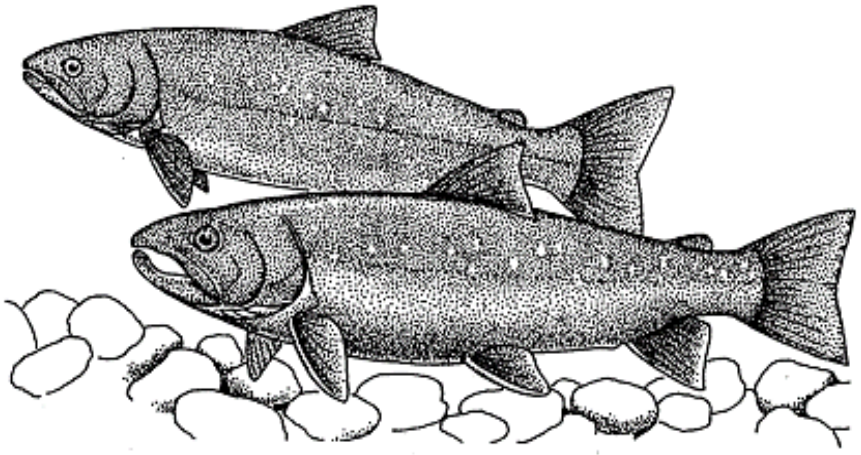
What are the threats to bull trout in the Snake River Washington Recovery Unit?

Historic land use practices have degraded bull trout habitat in this area. Dams installed in the early 1900's continue to block migration and may have significantly reduced important bull trout populations. Agricultural and irrigation practices, river channel modifications, improper livestock grazing methods, poor forestry practices, urbanization and competition with non-native fish species also threaten bull trout.

What are the recovery goals and objectives?

The goal of the bull trout recovery plan is to ensure the long-term persistence of self-sustaining, complex interacting groups of bull trout distributed across the species' range so that the species can be delisted. To recover bull trout in the Snake River Washington Recovery Unit, the following objectives have been identified:

Maintain current bull trout distribution and restore the species in previously occupied areas within the recovery unit.



- Maintain stable or increasing trends in adult bull trout abundance.
- Restore and maintain suitable habitat conditions for all bull trout life stages.
- Conserve genetic diversity and provide opportunity for genetic exchange.

What are the criteria for measuring recovery?

Recovery will be measured according to four criteria: distribution, abundance, population trends and connectivity in the watershed. The recovery plan includes specific, quantifiable standards for each of these criteria.

- **Distribution criteria** will be met when the total number of stable local populations has increased to 10 in the Tucannon River core area and seven in the Asotin Creek core area.
- **Abundance criteria** will be met when the Tucannon River core area supports an average of 1,000 spawners annually and when the Asotin Creek core area supports an average of 700 spawners annually.
- **Trend criteria** will be met when the overall bull trout population in each core area of the recovery unit is stable or increasing over a period of at least 10 years.
- **Connectivity criteria** will be met when migratory forms of bull trout are present in all local populations and when intact migratory corridors among all local populations in both core areas provide breeding opportunities.

What actions will be necessary to recover bull trout in the Snake River Washington Recovery Unit?
Actions to recover bull trout in this unit are arranged in a tiered manner and generally consist of enhancing habitat, improving water quality, and restoring stream connectivity and opportunities for migration and genetic exchange among local bull trout populations. For this recovery unit other actions include: Establishing fisheries management goals that are consistent with bull trout recovery, including development and implementation of State and Tribal native fish management plans; evaluating and preventing poaching and incidental angling mortality; evaluating the effects of non-native fish and associated sport fishing on bull trout and taking actions to minimize negative effects; evaluating existing and proposed sport fishing regulations on bull trout, including continued closure of bull trout fishing in the recovery unit.

How long will recovery take?
A recovery plan is advisory only and carries no regulatory authority; therefore it is difficult to determine how long it will take to recover bull trout in the Snake River Washington Recovery Unit. However, given our best estimate of what government agencies and others might do, it could take four to five bull trout generations (20 to 25 years) before identified threats to the species can be significantly reduced and bull trout can be considered eligible for delisting.

How much will recovery cost?
Estimating the cost of recovery is difficult and complex, due to many variables and unknowns. However, the Snake River Washington Recovery Unit team has estimated that recovery could cost about $1.6 million spread over 25 years. This includes estimates of expenditures by local, Tribal, State and Federal governments and by private business and individuals. The estimates are attributed to bull trout conservation but other aquatic species also will benefit. The Service is soliciting comments from the public on the estimated costs.

How can I obtain copies of the documents?
The documents, along with maps, fact sheets, photographs and other materials may be found on the Pacific Region's website at http://species.fws.gov/bulltrout.

How can I comment?
The Service will be accepting comments, beginning November 29, 2002, on its draft recovery plan for bull trout in the Columbia and Klamath river basins and in the St. Mary-Belly River Basin in Montana. Comments on the draft recovery plan will be accepted for 90 days, until February 27, 2003. Comments on the draft recovery plan may be mailed to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Snake River Basin Office, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, ID 83709; faxed to 208-378-5262, or sent via e-mail to: fw1srbocomment@fws.gov

Beginning November 29, 2002, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will accept comments from the public on the agency's proposal to designate critical habitat for the Columbia River and Klamath River distinct population segments of bull trout. Comments will be accepted for 60 days, until January 28, 2003. Comments on the critical habitat proposal may be submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Regional Office, attn: John Young, Bull Trout Coordinator, 911 N.E. 11th Avenue, Portland Oregon 97232; faxed to 503.231.6243 or e-mailed to: R1bulltroutCH@r1.fws.gov

In addition, a series of public meetings and public hearings will be held in January. Times and locations will be posted on our Bull Trout website at http://species.fws.gov/bulltrout and publicized in local newspapers.

This is only a brief summary. Please see full draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal for complete details.